



**US Army Corps  
of Engineers**

## **Day Use Fee Collection — Innovative Methods and Success Stories**

*Jim E. Henderson, U.S. Army Engineer Waterways Experiment Station*

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### **Purpose**

Implementation of day use fees in 1994 resulted in some concerns, questions, and problems related to efficient and effective implementation. With the problems also came some solutions and innovative methods for implementing day use fees.

At the recommendation of the Field Review Group for the Natural Resources Research Program, an effort is being made to collect and disseminate information regarding the implementation of day use fees—successes, good ideas, and common problems. This technical note is the initial effort in that information exchange.

This technical note will be updated in the future to include additional information provided by Corps projects and districts. If your project or district has solved a problem and you wish to share your success, this information can be included in future revisions of this technical note. If you have a problem and want to find out if another project has developed a better solution, the *Natural Resources Technical Notes* can be used to share information.

A Day Use Fee Workshop was held as part of the Ohio River Division's (ORD) Natural Resource Management Conference, held April 12-14, 1995, in Nashville, TN. "Good ideas" and "success stories" that were identified during the conference are summarized below. The remainder of the technical note describes materials submitted by Corps Districts and projects.

### **Good Ideas and Success Stories Identified in Day Use Fee Workshop**

Participants in ORD's Natural Resource Management Conference Day Use Fee Workshop related the following good ideas:

- Use volunteers to ensure compliance at honor vault sites. The volunteer can be given a free campsite (contributed by Nashville District).



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- Some areas have realized as much as a 17-percent increase in visitation as a result of increased security due to the presence of fee collection personnel (contributed by Fort Worth District).
- Providing warning citations (with an additional fee envelope) for people not displaying a receipt has resulted in high numbers of people paying (contributed by Pittsburgh District).

## Other Good Ideas and Success Stories Contributed by Corps Districts and Projects

### Honor Boxes—Compliance

"Use of Warning Citations for Noncompliance"

"Database Used for Mailed Purchase of Annual Passes"

*Project: Raystown Lake*

*District: Baltimore*

*Contact: Jude Harrington, Raystown Lake, (814) 658-3405, ext. 233*

The first season (1994), courtesy notices were issued for the first 2 months of day use fees. Now, reminder warnings are issued, and the warnings are tracked in a database. If no permit is visible on the vehicle, the database is checked. The database contains outstanding warnings from the past 12 months. If a warning has previously been given, a citation is issued. This system has resulted in a high rate of compliance.

The project office, using the names and addresses collected, used preprinted/prestamped postcards encouraging the visitors to purchase their annual passes through the mail. In addition, the project office offered annual pass gift certificates to be used as Christmas stocking stuffers. Sale of annual passes through the mail reduces traffic in the project office.

"Use of Warnings Citation, with Attention Notice, for Noncompliance"

"Annual Pass Purchase as Option Instead of Citation Fine"

*Project: Kaw Lake*

*District: Tulsa*

*Contact: Stanley Spirlock, Ranger, (405) 762-5611*

Prior to the day use fee program, Kaw Lake had extensive experience with self-deposit vaults. The project has four campgrounds where all camping fees are collected through self-deposit vaults and four other larger campgrounds where camping fees are collected part of the year by self-deposit vaults. Approximately \$40,000 per year is collected with this system. The experience from using the self-deposit system for camping fees has shown that the user must be held responsible for paying the camping fee, as apposed to the ranger being responsible for collecting the camping fee.

With the objective of implementing the Day Use Fee Program and a goal of making the users responsible for paying their Day Use Fee, Kaw Lake started collecting Day Use Fees at five boat ramps and two beaches shortly before the Fourth of July weekend in 1994. Three boat ramps and both beaches were set up for the self-deposit pay system. Rangers handed envelopes to over 800 vehicles at Sandy Park beach and

informed them about the Day Use Fee and how to pay and display receipt. Verbal directions and written warnings were used at boat ramps and Pioneer Park beach to inform users of the new fee program. After 2 weeks of warnings, compliance at boat ramps had improved. However, compliance at swimming beaches was very low.

Options for gaining compliance were discussed by all ranger staff members. All agreed that use of citations was the only workable option to gain compliance. However, all rangers were reluctant to issue \$75 citations for failure to pay fees that range from 50¢ to \$3.00. **Offering the option to buy an annual pass rather than paying for the citation must be first coordinated with and approved by the U.S. Attorney for the area, responsible for prosecuting citation violations in the U.S. Magistrate Court.** This idea has been approved for implementation in the Tulsa District. Ranger Spirlock suggested that a colored sheet of paper be inserted in each citation, with the following information:

<p style="text-align: center;">ATTENTION</p> <p style="text-align: center;">A \$25.00 ANNUAL DAY USE PASS MAY BE PURCHASED, IN WHICH CASE THE \$75.00 FINE FOR FAILURE TO PAY A DAY USE PERMIT WILL BE DROPPED.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ANNUAL PERMITS CAN BE PURCHASED ONLY AT THE KAW LAKE OFFICE IN PERSON OR BY MAIL WITHIN THREE DAYS. YOU MUST BRING THE CITATION WITH YOU OR MAIL IT TO THE LAKE OFFICE IF YOU CHOOSE TO ACQUIRE A PERMIT BY MAIL.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">KAW LAKE OFFICE R.R. 2, BOX 500 PONCA CITY, OK 74604</p> <p style="text-align: center;">OFFICE HOURS MON.-FRI. 8:00 A.M. -4:30 P.M. 1-405-762-5611</p>
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Using this system, a total of 331 citations were written in 1994 with the option to purchase the Annual Pass. When the first citations were brought in, the citations were voided and the reason was documented. Citations were voided for several reasons:

- Paid fee but thought receipt had to be in boat.
- Camper did not display camper pass provided by ranger or gate attendant.
- Receipt not visibly displayed in vehicle.

Documenting the reasons for voiding citations allowed for determination of Annual Pass purchases resulting from citations. Annual Passes sold from citations equaled 168 or approximately \$4,200. Compliance at boat ramps was raised to well over 90 percent, and swimming beach compliance also increased.

Use of this system is a benefit for everyone:

- The option system gives the violator a chance to save \$50, avoid taking time off from work and driving to Magistrate Court (a distance of 70 to 100 miles) from Kaw Lake, and receive an Annual Pass valid for the remainder of the year.
- Time saving for the Corps of Engineers includes the time required to obtain the name and address of the violator, time spent filling out the probable cause statement,

making copies, and filling out transmittal documents. Also saved is potential time required to deal with repeat violators.

- Central Violations Bureau would realize savings by having fewer citations to log, fewer letters to write to violators who fail to pay within 7 days, and less time spent preparing citation information for referral to the U.S. Magistrate Court.
- Money generated from the sale of Annual Passes increases the fees collected and returned to the local project.

The U.S. Attorneys in District Court were asked what they thought of this system and indicated they were pleased. At a Supervisory Park Ranger-Lake Manager meeting held in Tulsa during early 1995, one of the attorneys discussed the use of this option as benefitting all involved parties. Kaw Lake personnel have reported time savings for the U.S. Attorney's office and the U.S. Magistrate Court (with fewer cases on the Court docket) and less time spent preparing letters or summons for violators who fail to appear in court.

#### *"Use of Volunteers"*

*District: Nashville*

*Contact: Todd Yann, (615) 736-5115*

Collection rates for Honor Boxes are much higher at Nashville District projects where volunteers are camped at the area. The presence of the volunteers apparently deters visitors from not paying by giving the appearance that the honor boxes are being observed.

Several years ago, some Nashville District projects started providing a free campsite for volunteers to camp in the day-use areas. The objective was to provide a human presence in the areas and deter depreciative behavior. The free campsites for volunteers have proven highly successful in deterring depreciative behavior at day-use areas and has resulted in higher compliance at areas where fees are charged. Use of volunteers requires construction of a campsite and installation of electric and other facilities for the campsite.

### **Annual Passes**

#### *"Annual Pass—Procedures for Issuing Duplicates"*

*District: Huntington*

*Contact: Jack Nichol, (304) 529-5613*

In developing procedures to issue annual passes, we noticed there was no way of controlling the number of duplicate passes a visitor could possibly buy using the receipt that comes with the pass. One option was to offer the duplicate pass only when buying the original. However, this was considered too restrictive, and the following procedure was developed:

- When selling an annual pass, inform the visitor that a duplicate pass may be purchased if the visitor wants to use a second vehicle to access the day-use facility. If the visitor elects to buy a duplicate pass at that time, fill out another receipt and issue a duplicate pass in the same manner as the original. However, on the duplicate, check or punch out the "D" box on the front of the decal and check the duplicate box on the

duplicate receipt. Most important, you must also write a large "D" on the face of the visitor's copy of the original annual pass receipt. This large "D" indicates a duplicate has been issued for that original and will ensure that the visitor does not buy multiple duplicate passes.

- If the visitor elects not to buy the duplicate pass at the time they buy the original annual pass, inform the visitor to retain their copy of the original receipt. The original receipt must be presented at a later date in order to purchase a duplicate pass. No duplicate passes can be issued without presenting an original receipt.
- Encourage the visitor to affix the decal on his or her vehicle at the time of purchase to avoid the decal being lost or stolen. Replacements cannot be issued for decals that have been lost or stolen.

### **Automated Procedures**

#### **"Automated Entrance for Areas with Mixed Day Use and Camping/Other Uses"**

*Project: Belton Lake*

*Contact: Murray McCarley, (817) 939-1829*

The design of many recreation areas puts day-use and camping visitors in close proximity to each other. Some day users roam through the campgrounds at inappropriate times, disturbing the campers. In other cases, the entrance to a day-use area is also used as the entrance to a marina or other private-use area. These project design conditions are fairly common throughout the Corps and make implementation of the day use fee more difficult.

To maintain separation of day users and campers and to prevent unauthorized entry to the campground, gated-access systems have been installed at three parks at Belton Lake, Texas. The gate is operated by a key pad, and the code for the key pad is given out when the campers register.

A marina using the same entrance as the day-use area also uses the key pad entrance. Marina users had to be accommodated since access is needed to rented slips at times other than when the day-use area is open, and to accommodate use by marina groups at special times. The key pad access system purchased by Belton accommodates the needs of these groups using the same entrance.

The key pad and gate purchased at Belton can be programmed for

- Up to 100 different programmable codes, accommodating day use, camping, marina, and other potential user groups.
- Access to campgrounds by campers, during campground hours.
- Access to marina by users during marina operating hours, or for special groups, programmed for specific hours.
- Access by law enforcement 24 hours a day.

The access code is changed whenever needed (too many people know the code); marina users are notified in their monthly statements, and campers are notified.

The key pad is a PROkey System by Sentex Systems of Chatsworth, CA, sold through Federal APD. Belton purchased the system through a parking vehicle access control

company (Vehicle Access Controls, Dallas, TX). Cost of the key pad (March 1995) was \$1,050; costs of barrier gates are variable.

The advantage of the PROkey, or similar programmable key pads, is that access can be controlled to camping or other-use areas during hours the day-use area is closed or the gatehouse is unattended, reducing unwanted access by day users. Nonprogrammable key pads, which allow access any time, are available for approximately \$500.

#### *"Automated Fee Collection"*

#### *"Electronic Fee Collection"*

*Division: North Pacific*

*Contact: Jack Ardner, (503) 326-4087*

Since implementation of the day use fee program, numerous questions have been raised about "high-tech" methods of collecting fees, potentially minimizing use of full-time equivalents, and maximizing available technologies. The Washington, Oregon, and California State Parks Departments and British Columbia Parks have used electronic fee collection equipment for several years. This equipment is similar to that used to collect fees at unattended parking lots in large cities.

Experience with these automated machines has been good to date. However, Corps projects have not implemented this type of collection system, usually citing costs and the potential for vandalism.

In looking at innovative ways to implement the day use fee programs, it was suggested (during a February 28, 1995, meeting on the Recreation Fee work unit at Grapevine Lake) that electronic fee collection at least be investigated.

Jack Ardner checked on the electronic fee collection equipment suitable for Corps projects. Potential fee collection units that were identified had a range of capabilities, including the following:

- Automatic preparation of reports of money collected.
- Issuance of time and date receipts, which increases the voluntary compliance rates.
- Minimal maintenance required, in some cases even less frequently than weekly.
- Cash boxes are sealed, and more than one box can be installed (speeding up cash removal).
- Models are available to accept coin, paper money, credit cards, annual passes, and Golden Age Passports.
- Experience at parks to date reveals no vandalism.
- Models can be fitted to be accessed remotely by phone line, to determine how much money has been collected and when a pickup needs to be scheduled.

Equipment required includes a power line. In addition, a phone line will allow credit card verification and remote access to reports by project personnel.

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Advantages of electronic fee collection are summarized below.

- Use of staff for fee collection is minimized. The automated systems require minimal maintenance. Volunteers can be used for compliance checking. The automated reports reduce time and effort spent on money counting and the finance and accounting requirements.
- Compliance can be improved. Date and time stamps provide certainty on when visitors pay. Experience has shown that merely installing an electronic fee collection box will increase compliance by 20 percent. A modest amount of compliance checking will increase the compliance rate.
- The ability to use volunteers for compliance checking can effectively separate the "money handling/accountability" issue from the "compliance" issue.

Cost of fee collection equipment ranges from \$7,000 to \$14,000, depending on the amount and sophistication of the equipment purchased. Considering the amortization of capital improvements, this one-time cost can be amortized over the life of the equipment, so that annual costs may be as little as \$3,000.

## **Point of Contact**

For further information concerning this technical note or to contribute information regarding success stories or problems related to day use fee implementation, contact Mr. Jim E. Henderson, (601) 634-3305 (800-522-6937, ext. 3305); facsimile, (601) 634-3726; or e-mail, HENDERJ@EX1.WES.ARMY.MIL.